

## Sword Art Online: Punchline

by CannibalPlanet141

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Summary: Follow the story of Fintan Alfher A.K.A "Gaijin" on his adventure through the events of Sword Art Online as he strives to complete his goal of clearing the game with only his Martial Arts. Events stay cannon to the Light Novels and introduces characters from both the anime and Novels. Rated M for Coarse Language, Sexual Themes, and Intense Violence later on. (Updated Every Thurs.)

### 1. Beginnings

Here's the first chapter! Honestly I was a bit rushed on this one but I hope you'll still like it! My following chapters will be around 2000-3000 words so keep that in mind. (Updated Thursdays)

>Disclaimer: I don't own SAO, but thank you  
Kawahara-san.<br>\_\*\*"Hmm..."/\*\*\_ \*\*"Hmm..."::\*\* Fintan's thoughts/  
Spoken dialog  
>So anyways, Enjoy!<p>

I remember that day as if it happened hours ago. Warm Autumn winds were rare in Japan, especially from my rural home on the outskirts of Tokyo. Oddly enough I was never accustomed to the mountainous island nation, myself being adopted from Scotland. I was adopted at 6 years old by a nice Japanese couple, who quickly became my adoptive parents. My mother always told me that it was my spikey red hair and dark blue eyes that caught her attention. They were loving parents and luckily it was my mother who was a Japanese to English translator, allowing me to develop both languages.

I was grateful to make friends and to be accepted even though my height and appearance was so different than everyone else who lived in the East. It was honestly surprising. Even more so was that my parents made me keep my full birth name feeling as if it was the respectable thing to do, so my name has forever been Fintan Alfher. Most of my Japanese friends couldn't pronounce it so instead called

me "\_Gaijin\_" or foreigner. My parents took it as an insult at first but soon realized that I was just happy to have friends and a nickname, so it eventually stuck and my name became Gaijin.

It was those same friends that introduced me to video games and online gaming. While it was my adoptive father who introduced me to my other passion... Besides the day of my adoption, there was never a moment where I was more excited than the launch of Sword Art Online. Normally when waiting for the next AAA title game to be released, I would over-hype the product itself and lose interest very quickly. Under normal circumstances perhaps this would be the case but this, this was different. No matter how I sliced it, the risk of "over-hyping" SAO outweighed the opportunity or reward of its gameplay and that in itself drew me towards the first VRMMO-RPG (\_Virtual Reality Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game\_) to roam the market. The equally exciting console was released as well, "\_NerveGear\_" for all those willing to try something revolutionary. The NerveGear was the first device that allowed players to be fully immersed in a virtual world and experience it with all five senses. Gaming had evolved over the years from those ancient consoles and controllers to actually being inside the game and playing it like never before. Almost driving myself mad was almost a common action during that time. It got to the point where I thought my friends would start calling me "baka gaijin".

I soon read and listened to every interview with Kayaba Akihiko, the creator of \_Sword Art Online\_ and the NerveGear like every other hyped potential gamer across Japan. It was all I thought about for months; considering what kind of character I wanted and equipment I'd eventually acquire. I religiously stalked the SAO official website and forums daily for news on the game or console. Most of my friends just labeled me insane and ignored my obsession. Unlike the lucky 1000 players that were granted passage into the Beta, I was left on the sidelines much like the rest of Japan. Although Kayaba did his best to cover up leaks and control the information being released some beta testers were kind enough to write about SAO and the NerveGear on their personal blogs and on social media. I was mostly interested in any leaks dealing with equipment and features, for that made me most excited. Sword Art Online was to most a game of sword skills but to me, I wanted something else out of it.

My absolute goal was unpractical, Definitely not strategic, and overall idiotic in a game of swords. Before the launch of SAO I vowed to myself that I'd clear this game with only my Taijutsu. To most, abandoning game mechanics and relying on pure skill seemed foolish and only worked in dreams, but not to me. Starting at an early age, my adoptive father brought me to work with him at our family's local Dojo. Growing up, I loved watching my dad and his students until I became one myself. The love for martial arts given to me by my father has fueled my gaming campaign and interest in fighting games, ones that required true skill with memorization of combinations and characters as well as weaknesses against certain types and whether or not to be quick on my feet or hurl powerful blows.

I knew I'd obtained true strength when my friends would turn down my duels. I created my own logic to fighting with only my Martial arts and it created the ultimate challenge of any world, real or virtual and by throwing myself into a game of blades...well that only added excitement. Numerous one on one sessions led to my own defined fighting style. Knowing full well there wasn't an unarmed leveling

system in SAO didn't stop me from wanting to fulfill my dream and clearing the game. Instead, my time prior to launch was spent creating my own moves in the dojo and honing numerous stances. Weighing in at 140 pounds and raising 5'10, I was able to develop maneuvers supporting speed over power and spent my time in the gym working on endurance training. On November 6th, 2022 I was finally prepared just in time for launch.

I had spent the previous three days waiting in line to pick up my pre-order of Sword Art Online and the NerveGear. When I got home after rushing down the road on my bike, the door to my house and then room was slammed open in anticipation. I remember my window being opened upstairs in my room, and the breeze felt overwhelmingly warm, contrast to the ice blue sky towering above. It was never something I'd forgotten as the Autumn koyo saturated the trees in crimson red all around town and especially across the field from my house and into the ever expanding forest consuming the view from my window.

The captivating scenery kept me from the NerveGear at hand and seemed to last as it always did, up until December around this region. In some regards I almost wish it kept me from playing Sword Art Online and held me hostage until the leaves blew away and the next season bloomed. Pulling myself away from the window I was able to unbox the NerveGear carefully without damaging the packaging. Once I realized it was 12:45, I impatiently ripped off the plastic covering to SAO and violently forced open the case as if it were a gold discovery. Placing the NerveGear helmet on my head spiked my curiosity and further worsened the anxiety built up inside me.

The internal battery came fully charged and only required the charging and Ethernet cables to be connected. Initial set up was child's play, allowing me to finish in ten minutes without an issue. Next, I turned on the NerveGear and was immediately bombarded with configuration commands such as "Touch your shoulders, knees, and toes". I couldn't help but wonder how awkward the situation was to someone looking in. They might be thinking "There's a 16 year old boy with a helmet on his head...touching his toes". I just ignored this possibility and continued beaming with joy. All feelings of enjoyment were increased as I confirmed the SAO disk was inserted and operating properly in my NerveGear.

I made sure the note to my parents were placed on my desk stating "Do not under any circumstances remove my helmet, it will ruin my night" and proceeded to lay down on the twin bed to the right of me with full intention of not waking up until the next day. Remembering all the hardships and work I went through to get this opportunity, the numerous months of waiting, and the overall torture I'd put myself through for this very experience, I slowly closed my eyes as if it were deep meditation and repeated the phrase that'd been played as a broken record to myself and to my friends... \*\*"LINK START!".\*\*

I remember my soul feeling as if it'd been transferred through time and space with the sudden overproduction of colors and the natural feeling of epilepsy absorbed through my eyes. A generic title screen popped up as the loading finished. "Would you like to use your beta testing avatar?" I obviously selected the red "X" as I didn't have one... The alert window closed instantly and whited out before manifesting the grand title "Welcome to Sword Art Online" where it remained blinding to the soul for a few seconds before once again

fading to white. Looking back even with full knowledge of the events ahead, I still would've proceeded with the power of a white horse. November 6th, 2022 only got more exciting from here on out.

This is my recollection of events past...

## 2. The World of Sword Art Online

Hey guys sorry for the delay in publishing, I'm trying to release one chapter a week but I just got caught up in work. So sorry about the inconvenience but let's get into it.

>Disclaimer: I don't own SAO, If I did it would have a longer first arc.<br>\_\*\*"Hmm..."\_\*\* "Hmm...":\*\* Fintan's thoughts/ Spoken dialog  
>Enjoy!<p>

The white light dissipated once more and I found myself engulfed in amazement. \_\*\*"Is this really a virtual world?"\*\*\_ was the question at stake for the other 9,999 players logged in currently. Guiding my eyes downward, I took note of the basic gear currently equipped in the menu and analyzed the stats attached. Training coat, fighter's trousers, and leather boots are all labeled as "\_Beginner's Gear\_". The Training coat consists of a dark blue long sleeve undershirt covered by a light chainmail vest and all held together through leather straps and buckles. The trousers could be passed as grey, although they appear to be darker. To finish my inspection, I could feel the trouser pant legs tucked into the basic boot liner comfortably. Also in my equipment slot was a slim Iron dagger and it's sheathe. Glancing at the blade, I rejected the idea in spite of my ultimate goal. \_\*\*"I'd never considered throwing weapons to be part of one's Taijutsu until now, maybe I'll give it a go sometime but now's not that chance, Right now I should focus..."\*\*\_

The endless chatter of first time players saturated the spawn point before me. \_\*\*"I must get out of here..."\*\*\_ I muttered over the crowd of people. When logging in I kept the avatar settings at default so luckily this body feels normal enough to ignore the sudden motion sickness from spawning. The crowd of people spread wide across the massive stone plaza continues to restrict my exit strategy.

\_\*\*"Pushing people aside seems like the best option..."\*\*\_

Although normally acceptable in most MMO's, there's no clipping in SAO so running through people isn't allowed. I'll have to negotiate foot-traffic if I want to make it to the the Training Grounds. With numerous prepared apologies, my march of death through the crowd of cheerfully distracted players commenced without delay. I'd been taking notice of the oddly uneven proportion of female and male avatars surrounding me. Either the players were true to their gender (Which I doubt) or the more plausible option that 90 percent of those dominating "females" were sweaty fat dudes above 40+, but even then I guess everyone has a right to play VR so I've got no reason to judge. By this point I've probably repeated "\_Sumimasen\_" enough times for the game admins to report me for spam. It's taken awhile but the gate to this massive stone city finally opened, and sense of awe passed over me. Now that I've reached an exit the notice board to my right instantly updated me on the local pathways and roads outside the city. The menu activation was still tripping me up but not enough to

remotely irritate me, not in this world.

The GPS in the corner of my view directed me northeast from the city and into the forest. The winding dirt path stretched out before me towards a large clearing a few miles ahead. A real blend of emotions including nervousness, excitement, and above all gratitude towards Kayaba boiled inside me and soon after cooled into unspoken joy. I was never one to feel or act overly dramatic due to my humble experience in an orphanage but this feels as if it deserves to be an exception. The steady breeze flowing through the forest only further enhances my excitement. This sensation of being inside a game has proven to be addicting. I'm still figuring it all out and just trying to grasp the concept. Even speculating the physical mechanics of the game engine sends Goosebumps down my spine.

No matter how many times I've told myself `_"**"It's a game, It's only just a game"*_` still has yet began to quench my thirst for answers. This world, this grass, this very dirt I walk on isn't reality But just a simulation of a stimulation. The reality we set ourselves in on earth is just stimulation, we as humans set out to conquer but not like the past. We conquer the grocery store when we buy eggs versus the English settlers of the 1700's who conquered unexplored territory. Dropping yourself into the unknown and not aisle 8 is true stimulation, true joy, and true adventure.

Sword Art Online is exactly that. A pioneer of its time, SAO is a path of future adventures in many different forms. 10,000 players on a single server put forth the initiative to advance this wonder. I had once tried to convince my friends to join the sensation of SAO and pre-order the NerveGear along with Sword Art Online but it never caught their attention or peaked their interest. It felt like a lost cause so I dropped it.

Sadly enough, I'm wishing there was `_someone_` in this with me. It felt like my childhood all over again...being the outlier, outcast, oddball and basically everything else I was called. Although I eventually made friends, the first few years in Japan were rough. My parents hadn't established our home we live in now until I turned 14. For me it was hell, Moving place to place and all around Japan for 8 years. Every school meant a new bully or a new experience of isolation. I can't lie and say no friends were made, but not enough to take the edge off and certainly not enough to make me feel normal. That's why when I finally made some friends in High school the feeling was so fulfilling that when they nicknamed me "Gaijin" any hatred I had for that word peeled off and underneath was a miracle.

As the self-reflection continued, a sudden light blinded me from above causing me to trip on my own foot.

`**"W-Whoa!"**`

I extended my arms only to find out there wasn't any ground below me. My ankles traded places with the space a certain someone's shoulders were moments ago.

`**"FUCK! AHHHHHHHH!"**`

Opening my eyes, a vision of wide grass fields spread before me. Turning my head sideways required a fair amount of effort until

suddenly I experienced slamming into something stone-like and the rest felt like a washing machine. I started hearing a loud beeping indication and directly after, my health bar expanded across my field of view flashing red. Looking up, it appeared as if I fell off a high ledge and hit a large stone. Also in detail was a purple notification stating "\_Immortal Object\_" placed directly above the natural structure.

\_"\*\*"I almost died right there, well no big deal...it IS just a game. But holy shit that was terrifying"\*\*-"

Once again I placed my arms below, pushing myself up with ease. Feeling dizzy, I miss-stepped and fell over once more.

\_"\*\*"Sure I can rest for a sec..."\*\*-"

Turning over on my back felt relaxing. The breeze passing through the forest cascaded down the ledge and spread over the vast training field causing the grass to flow all at once. My Spikey red hair picked up with the wind, mimicking the endless plains. The peaceful atmosphere left me drowsy Minutes passed and the in-game clock read 2:24 pm. Lying there, I began to close my eyes and eventually drifted to sleep... Images of home flashed about and dissipated multiple times over. \_\*\* "Mom...Dad... Finally, I'm free..."\*\*-

\_"An Unknown amount of time later..."-

It was dark...I couldn't see anything but the UI interaction display in my view. My head feels locked into place and I'm unable to speak. As I try to move my arms, realizing they're bound to my legs came as frustration.

\_"\*\*"Hogtied, Damn..."\*\* I thought to myself.

Luckily my fingers are loose enough to wiggle around. I guided two fingers downward, activating the menu. The action was awkward and difficult to complete but I managed...barely. Searching for the correct icon is what I must do. My finger pressed on the greyed "\_logout\_" key and to my surprise, nothing happened. Trying this multiple times, proved the results to be the same. Listening around me, I made out a faint noise of Conversing coming from behind. An extreme feeling of hunger I hadn't felt yet also pushed itself into priority. Each groan coming from my stomach was accompanied by a long drawn feeling of pain and aches.

The sound of footsteps interrupted my lack of food. The sound of chatter became more audible as the footsteps migrated closer. Pushing my fingers against their counterpart thumbs revealed very sharp fingernails.

With a sudden flick of the wrists I made small incisions to the cloth bounding me and pulling downward at an angle, It destroyed the bindings. My hands pressed against the surface below me, which felt to be wooden. Pulling my legs upward, I anchored a handstand with my bare feet also positioned on a wood like surface. \_\*\*"Am I in a barrel?"\*\*- The footsteps ended with a heavy stomp and the conversation was now clear.

A Loud, aged voice was heard shouting "Open her up".

Then, a youthful tone replied "Y-Yeah" and light scatter-like footsteps were heard running over.

"I don't have all day Matako! Get your dumbass over here and open these barrels!"

"Y-yes sir! I won't be long at all."

A sudden bash of metal on wood loosened the barrel top resting on my feet. In seconds, light from above filled the wooden container as the top ejected off with a Taijutsu blow dead center. A sound of troubled panic came from Matako as the barrel top nailed the larger man in the forehead, knocking him down with virtually no struggle. Using the momentum generated from the barrel lid flying off, I tipped the container over and worm crawled myself out. Looking around, I took note of multiple barrels stacked on each other being loaded onto a wooden cargo ship.

\*\*\*"There's no water on floor one-\*\*\* Matako interrupted me, terrified.

"T-th-tha-that's c-c-cause you're ON FLOOR 50!"

Matako is currently cowering behind a nearby barrel to my right. From the waist up, he's wearing a basic white shirt, his long blonde hair is ponytailed behind his head and he's allowed his scruffy beard to hang low from his chin.

\*\*\*"Wait What?!"\*\*\*

Sure enough, after reading the Interaction UI display in the upper left corner of my view it read February 23th, 2024, Floor 50:  
Algade

\_"\*\*"That would explain the missing logout icon... We must be trapped in this game, there's no way we would've made it to only floor 50 in two years time unless there's a consequence for death that's holding players back...or even death itself. Damn it Kayaba." \*\*\_

\*\*\*"I've been out this entire time?"\*\*\*

"Well it l-looks like it, but you seem familiar"

\*\*\*"How so?"\*\*\*

"Well one of the front line players k-kinda looks like you, but a bit older and w-well taller..." Matako said with confusion.

\*\*\*"A player looks like me?"\*\*\* I asked with intrigue.

"Y-yeah..." He paused.

>"There was this really tall swordsman on the front lines that-" He paused again.<br>"Well he wasn't a swordsman. It's unknown what he is exactly but some people say he's just a myth and has absolute zero skill with any weapons. Some people called him "\_Ryu\_" after that amazing flying style martial arts of his. And well your obviously not him because I mean you're too young...and s-short".

Hearing Matako say that was the first time anyone used the term "\_Short\_" to describe me and quite frankly I was a bit

confused.

"I'd say you're about 4'6 or 4'7 considering these barrels are 4 foot"

\_"\*\*"4'7?!"\*\*\_"

"Yeah I was sure scared when a little kid flew out of that barrel and dropped Iwao back there..."

Speechless and standing in front of Mataka, looking down confirmed the child like transformation, a lack of any combat gear, and brought on a state of curiosity. I turned around and observed my surroundings. A nearby town is generating a good amount of noise. Chatter, laughter, and overall stimulation pulled me away from the current situation im in.

"H-Hey kid I know this is a lot to take in but do you have any parents? Or anyone that takes care of you?"

\*\*"Look. I'm not a kid by any means. I just don't know where I am or how I got here, and I'm fine on my own"\*\*

"A-Alright I'm just-" A tired and brash voice interrupted Mataka.

"W-Who's the little shit that drop kicked my ass on my own goddamn shipping dock?"

My head turned itself towards Iwao as did Mataka's.

\*\*"Hey dumbass get over here and I'll do it again"\*\*

A hand attempted to grapple my leg. The one benefit of being a kid again was that this body allowed for nimble movement. Sidestepping his attack is effortless due to his clunky and slow movements.

"You little shit!"

Still being prone, Iwao left his body open for an easy strike. My leg extended outward, allowing my foot to make contact with his head and I essentially curb stomped him into the dock. Mataka had retreated by this point as he was nowhere in sight.

\*\*"Stay down"\*\* I comanded.

I walked away, making sure to step on Iwao's head while doing so, and placed my hands into my pockets. I never cared to put on shows or over dramatize my Taijutsu >with the exception of Iwao's deserved ass-kicking. Somehow I felt different, as if my body remembered countless senarios just like that one. <em><strong>"I was never a glorified badass so why now?"<strong>\_. The only thing that remained clear in my mind was what Mataka told me...

\_"\*\*"Ryuu, huh..."\*\*\_"

End  
file.